News From the Wyoming Department of Health

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Bird Flu Movie Should Not Lead to Panic

CHEYENNE - While an ABC television movie airing tonight depicts a devastating American influenza pandemic directly caused by bird flu, officials from the Wyoming Department of Health say there is no reason for bird flu-related panic.

"People should recognize this movie is a work of fiction designed to entertain in a very dramatic fashion," said Dr. Tracy Murphy, Wyoming Department of Health state epidemiologist

"There is **no** influenza pandemic in the world right now, and the bird flu we hear so much about is primarily a disease affecting birds," Murphy said.

"The H5N1 avian influenza virus has not yet appeared in this country," Murphy continued. "And should the H5N1 virus show up in America, by no means does it mean a pandemic has started or is even imminent."

Pandemic influenza is a global outbreak from a new influenza virus that is unlike past viruses. Because most or all people do not have natural immunity to new pandemic viruses, they can spread rapidly. Influenza pandemics occur naturally, and it is not possible to predict when influenza pandemics will occur or how severe they will be. Murphy noted the next influenza pandemic could be much, much less severe than what the movie depicts.

Murphy also said the film dramatizes situations that could unfold should a severe pandemic ever develop, including limited availability of antivirals and vaccines as well as the potential for disruption of supplies, medicines and other essential services.

"Preparation is not the same thing as panic," said Dr. Brent Sherard, Wyoming Department of Health director. "The federal government, the state of Wyoming, local communities and industry are taking action to get ready for the next influenza pandemic." The state has prepared a pandemic flu plan, and Department of Health officials have been meeting with community members around the state about local planning efforts.

"There are also a number of common-sense steps you can take for yourself and your family to prepare such as keeping a supply of food and medicines on hand in case you have to stay home," Sherard said. "These measures are helpful whether you are facing pandemic flu or a strong Wyoming blizzard."

"Fatal Contact: Bird Flu in America" is scheduled to air tonight (Tuesday, May 9) on local ABC network stations. For more information about pandemic flu planning in Wyoming, please visit http://wdh.state.wy.us/epiid/flu.asp.